

The Century of the Rights of Children

Ellen Key's Legacy towards a New Childhood Culture

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the most interesting insights expressed by Ellen Key in her famous work *Barnets Århundra* [*The Century of the Child*]. Here she anticipates and fosters some of the principles concerning the new, twentieth-century concept of the Rights of Children. Thus, this paper will suggest that Key's text, far from being a naïve and optimistic manifesto, can be instead defined as a clear and keen work, which shows the way to the development of a new childhood culture, focused on the full recognition of the child and of his/her rights.

The paper will focus on the main elements of the theoretical framework supporting the pedagogical perspective Key shows in *The Century of the Child*. Then, attention will be drawn to the meaning and the relevance of her position on children's rights: central to the discussion will be those principles that turn out to be more influential in the current debate on the rights of the child: the right to be loved, to choose his/her parents, to be naughty.

Keywords: Children's Rights, Childhood Culture, History of Childhood, Childhood Education, History of Children's Rights.

Introduction

During the twentieth century, contemporary society developed a conception of fundamental rights which, gradually over the course of the century, was finally able to include childhood in the culture of human rights in a clear and convinced way. It was a process of complicated conquest of visibility and social meaning by a subject who was silent and invisible for very long stretches in the history of mankind. There were two main historical access routes to the theme of children's rights during the twentieth century (Macinai, 2013, p. 91): one was juridical, the other was cultural. Retracing these two perspectives means bringing out the complexity of the socio-cultural transformations during the twentieth century that allowed the triggering of the process of identification and specification of children's rights. A key contribution

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was offered during the first three decades of the twentieth century by a number of intellectuals who studied, for different reasons and with different sensitivity and involvement, children's education. This was a decisive approach for the emergence of a feeling of childhood capable of conceiving and supporting a disorienting and paradoxical idea such as that of children's rights. Even earlier than the juridical dimension, it was the cultural and more precisely educational one that was the key to see how, from the nineteenth-century mentality based on the concept of protection and that related to it of duty, one gradually passed to the positive concept of children's rights in the early part of the twentieth century. This was the gateway to the child's rights that the twentieth century took through the thinking and practice of education; this was the cultural dimension of the genesis of children's rights.

Alongside this perspective, and in the same period, coinciding with the first three decades of the century, there would then be the juridical dimension of the first elaboration of the idea of children's rights and this can only be grasped within the more extensive social context regarding children's living conditions including starting to work young, material suffering and existential insecurity further exacerbated by the consequences of the First World War. This was the material dimension of the genesis of children's rights in the stage prior to their official codification. I think it is extremely difficult to fully understand the significance of the contents elaborated in the international charters if you do not bring to light those cultural, and more specifically pedagogical, elements which worked as a nourishment and a prerequisite for the translation into the juridical jargon of revolutionary principles which, starting with the renewal of the educational relationship between adult and child, allowed the spread of a new vision of childhood.

The objective of this paper is to follow this perspective, identifying in the most important work of Ellen Key and, more generally, in her pedagogical thinking with respect to the child, the family and parenthood, one of the sources that from the beginning of the twentieth century fuelled the process of social inclusion of childhood and the full membership of boys and girls in the human structure.

The pedagogical root of the culture of childhood rights

From the cultural, and more specifically educational point of view, the most direct access route to the spread of an approach to the rights of children which moved from full recognition of the peculiarities of childhood compared to adults was represented by education. If during the first season of children's rights, which coincided with the first three decades of the twentieth century, social, political and juridical attention focused on questions concerning the safeguarding and regulation of child labour, since extension of protection to other key areas, such as education, health and well-being depended on this, it was in the field of education that there developed in a

profound way a decisive rethinking of the adult/child relationship that would develop in the century thereafter around those features that for the first time were underlined. The child's humanity, his/her conquest of autonomy, the ability to develop his/her own vision of the world and reality, the need to be heard and recognition of his/her uniqueness. While at the juridical, as it were official level, full entitlement to specific rights would be recognised to children only during the second half of the twentieth century and with many difficulties, in the first quarter of the twentieth century this concept was already beginning to take shape in the works of intellectuals, educationists and enlightened educators who to some extent proved capable of anticipating the times and started the propagation of cultural content that would feed, once they were sufficiently spread in the collective thinking, the basic principles of that culture of childhood rights that could only impose itself in more recent times.

It is therefore possible to sustain that in addition to the dimension of social redemption through work, which opened the access route to the development of economic and social rights of the child and to their juridical codification, there was a deep pedagogical root that was a prelude to the conquest of the rights to freedom, which would prove to be far more complicated and contrasted over time. Rereading in this light, the experience and legacy of some of the figures of the start of the century, the pedagogical root of children's rights is clearly recognisable. The child appeared there as a person who was not in a position to directly, autonomously and explicitly express their requests to the outside world: (s)he therefore needed someone who could give him/her the faculty of speech by interpreting his/her interests and who, consequently, could take charge of the task of transforming these mute requests into truly available living conditions.

The idea that at the beginning of the twentieth century was slowly but progressively spreading was that knowing a child means first and foremost establishing an interpersonal relationship with a subject capable of interacting in an active and responsible manner, although not in the usual manner that one forms social relations during the adult age. It is therefore in the context of interpersonal relationships, and in particular in the educational relationship with the adult, that the child can deploy his/her unique communication skills and draw attention to his/her own basic needs for growth and existential well-being. The adult, in particular an adult educator, must pay attention and listen, maturing awareness that a person who cannot, due to their own constitutive conditions, autonomously create the situations in which his/her basic needs are satisfied, means that these have to be translated into the form of rights. A common element in the conception of the authors that we might identify as authentic precursors of the idea of the human rights of childhood, is the premise that every right recognised to boys and girls involves a correlative commitment by the adult society (family, school, public institutions and state) for its realisation: every need of children can be translated into a fundamental human right and specific for

childhood, and this in turn into a duty for the adult. The figures that it is worth remembering as equally anticipatory to the idea of children's rights are, along with Ellen Key, the Polish physician and educator Janusz Korczak and the Italian educator Maria Montessori. With different contributions, these three figures paved the way towards the recognition of the fundamental principles that animated the entire subsequent debate around the contents of the specific rights of children.

The century of the child: towards a renewed culture of childhood

Ellen Key grew up and was educated in a middle-class family environment that in a word could be called progressive. She had the opportunity to study at the Academy of Art in Stockholm and, so as to complete her path of training, to travel around Europe, coming into direct contact with the most avant-garde cultural, scientific and political trends of her time (Grandi, 2014, p. 40). A path certainly not customary for young women of the time, which however, did not correspond fully to Key's aspirations (Pironi, 2011, p. 2). She interrupted her studies before they were concluded to devote herself to elementary school teaching and this was a further decisive element in her autobiography, since it enabled her to gain a concrete awareness of the world of childhood and of the contradictions and limitations of an education system anchored to rigidly traditional principles and practices.

In what was surely her most famous work, *The century of the child*, we find one of the first approaches to the idea of childhood rights (Macinai, 2013, p. 94). The book came out bearing in its title an auspice that the author addressed to twentieth century society and culture (Becchi, 1996, p. 353; Cambi, 2003, p. 175; Ulivieri, 1999, p. 299): the hope of being able to fulfil the promises of improvement in the living conditions of boys and girls that the progress of scientific knowledge on childhood, particularly medicine and pedagogy, allowed them to nourish. In formulating this hope, Ellen Key found support in the scientific theories that in those years, especially in the field of medicine, biology and genetics, lead to major changes in knowledge about man and life (Trisciuzzi, 1990, pp. 27-30). Key looked with great interest at that progress: science seemed now to allow her to address in a secular and anti-dogmatic way the pedagogical issues at the centre of her interest, having placed any mention of a religious nature in to one side. Religion was no longer necessary to provide pedagogical responses to human educational needs, now that positive science seemed to provide the foundation for the building of secular ethics, and it would be this to supplant the traditional religious, dogmatic morality that was potentially damaging for the child and for society (Cunningham, 1997, p. 201).

The pedagogical vision developed by Ellen Key seems deeply inspired by the principles of social Darwinism (Ambjornsson, 2014, pp. 139-142): once the biological theories of evolution have been applied to society, education will be loaded with

almost eschatological meanings since bound to it is the historical possibility of the realisation of a new idea of human development. In the positivist approach to social evolution, borrowed from Herbert Spencer, Key could therefore find a scientific and secular outlook that allowed her to redefine the idea of human and societal development in a worldly, anti-dogmatic and teleological key (Ambjornsson, 2014, p. 141). The historical-dialectic outlook of socialism allowed her, on the other hand, the elaboration of a pedagogical vision that linked education to concrete human needs, to the need for emancipation and self-realisation of man and woman; and more generally, it was what allowed her to historicise and humanise the very idea of development (DiQuinzio, 1999, p. 43).

In this framework, unexpected possibilities were offered to education and it did not seem utopian to pose as a long term, but achievable goal, the creation of a better humanity. Man, and this is self-evident, was not created as he is; rather, he has become what he is now. There was no room for any ontological conception of the human being in Ellen Key's thinking (Pironi, 2010, p. 86): history bears witness to the evolution of humanity, or at least attests to the fact that it changes over time, transforming itself in different eras. It was therefore not only plausible, but also desirable, to think that humanity could be better in the epoch to come, that culture, and more specifically education could influence the historical change of man and improve the humanity of tomorrow. Provided that contemporary culture proved able to develop a scientific thinking on the education of man and that contemporary society proved ready to implement those measures to ensure the realisation of the principles set out by that thought, then it would be possible to expect that man begins to behave responsibly and consciously even in those activities in which so far he has relied on instinct or metaphysical dogmas: that is, in the education of children.

“In no respect has culture remained more backward than in those things which are decisive for the formation of a new and higher race of mankind” (Key, 1909, p. 5): in the vision of Ellen Key this remained the last field of backwardness of contemporary culture, where an archaic and superstitious thought still resisted dominated by religious or metaphysical beliefs. It was therefore necessary to extend a scientific approach to educational culture, to free the power of family education through a greater awareness and responsibility of parents.

In this perspective, the issue of children's rights was inserted in *The century of the child*. The call for the identification of specific rights of children took on the form of a heartfelt appeal to parents, primarily responsible for the quality of life of children, and to society as a whole, which in turn is responsible for supporting families and maternity with appropriate services; her writing has an explicit educational goal: Ellen Key does not use juridical jargon, but anticipates with a rhetorical and at times paradoxical language some of the fundamental principles that later in the twentieth century we would find expressed with greater rigour in international documents.

The international success that her work acquired in a short time, even outside of Europe (Ambjornsson, 2014, pp. 155-156, 159; Lengborn, 1993, p. 825), gives evidence of just how well the author had hit the mark, giving voice to a widespread interest in a more enlightened public opinion and paving the way for those who would give their contribution to the emergence of a new cultural phase concerning children's rights. The twentieth century was to be, according to the wishes of Ellen Key, the century of a new and deeper awareness of the responsibility that the adult world has towards children, beginning with the parents: they are the main recipients of the educational message that animates this Swedish author's pages, they are the ones who have to learn even before getting married what it means to give birth and raise a child, what obligations and what burdens it would bring. In the background, there is the open criticism of a society that still sees marriage in purely economic or political terms, as a dynastic or asset planning strategy of the passage of the name, but always through a male linearity that penalises women, but whose sacrificial victims are however always the children:

[...] how foolish is that requirement of society to press human nature, in its manifold types, into one mould, with a sphere of duty arranged in the same way for all. But the sphere of duty, an ever-widening one, is the sphere which embraces the right of the child. Yet its lines will be drawn in the future bounded in quite a different way from now. It will then be looked upon as the supreme right of the child that he shall not be born in a discordant marriage. Above everything, therefore, marriage must be free (Key, 1909, p. 39).

As said, the language with which Ellen Key expresses the rights of children is not juridical, little or in no way suitable to the aim of her writing, which as mentioned is primarily pedagogical. It is a heartfelt and direct language that makes use of rhetoric as well as logic: it uses metaphors and hyperbole to bring the non-specialist but concerned reader closer to abstract and general principles. Sometimes, as Philip Veerman aptly commented, reading these pages today gives the feeling of being faced with a "medieval manuscript", such is the distance covered between that and the current phase of elaboration regarding children's rights (Veerman, 1992, p. 77): some of those rights have been radically transformed in current language, others are just suggested by the author who sees them without fully recognising them, yet others are totally rejected in the light of historical experiences which have harshly disavowed the starting ideas through the disastrous results they produced.

Ellen Key forerunner of children's rights

Here, we draw attention to three principles that could be clearly traced in Key's text and that express in a nutshell some basic content of the nascent culture of children's rights.

The child's right to be loved

Every child has the right to be loved by the parents who brought him into the world and by the society of which he becomes a part at birth; it is the right of an unborn child and that identifies in love the only reason for his future birth; in an era when marriages are still largely contracted for economic or political calculations or represent the only strategy possible to repair a conduct deemed indecent and immoral, this principle states that every child has the right to come into the world because they are wanted by their parents; and makes an appeal to consider parenting a conscious and deliberate choice, not a moral obligation or a biological necessity, much less a social imposition:

The time will come in which the child will be looked upon as holy, even when the parents themselves have approached the mystery of life with profane feelings; a time in which all motherhood will be looked upon as holy, if it is caused by a deep emotion of love, and if it has called forth deep feelings of duty. Then the child, who has received its life from sound, loving human beings and has been afterwards brought up wisely and lovingly, will be called legitimate, even if its parents have been united in complete freedom (Key, 1909, p. 44).

Parental love is the first right of the child, so obvious and yet so frequently violated: every child should be born to parents who wanted him and began to love him even before he was born. A marriage contracted and lived without love contradicts this central principle in the vision of children's rights prepared by Ellen Key (Pironi, 2011, p. 4). But of course, parental love alone is not enough to express the content of this principle: the child is entitled to be desired by the society that he will become a part of. How can it prove that it loves every child who comes and will come into the world? The love expressed by society towards the child is an impersonal love; it expresses "love" for children by taking on the responsibility to support families who decide to give birth to a child and by accompanying mothers before, during and after the birth of the child, realising social assistance and safeguarding motherhood, adopting measures of economic support to families in need, creating places for the reception and care of children during the first stages of life. Or even better, says Key, freeing the woman from work outside the home imposed by the capitalist production

model prevailing in a society still unable “to consider care of the new generation, as the great business the mother takes over for society” (Key, 1909, p. 86).

The recognition of maternity as a social value in Ellen Key is explicit and radical and goes as far as to propose considering it as a form of “public work” (Lundell, 1984, p. 353). The theme of women's emancipation is placed in existential even before political terms, points out Tiziana Pironi; but the personal choice, and the assumption of responsibility that follows from this choice, can be independent and free only on condition that the society supports her fully, concretely and thoroughly, relieving the woman from work outside the home and adopting forms of economic subsidy for mothers during the first few years of a child's life (Pironi, 2010, p. 84):

I believe that in the new society where all women and men alike will be compelled to work (not children, not invalids, and not the aged) people will regard the maternal function as so important for the whole social order, that every mother under fixed conditions, subject to certain control, during a certain period, and for a certain number of children, will obtain from society an allowance for education. She will receive this during the time in which her children require all her care, while she herself is freed from work outside the home (Key, 1909, p. 85).

In light of this premise we can understand her clear opposition to the collective education of children, of philanthropic mould, functional to the preservation of a capitalist productive system in which work outside the home, rather than an element of women's empowerment, is a penalising chain at the existential level for the woman, besides impairing the child's fundamental right to full and unconditional love from the mother (Lundell, 1984, p. 354): “Children's crèches, kindergartens, providing meals for children, hospitals, vacation homes, cannot with all their noble efforts replace a hundredth part of the life energy, taken directly or indirectly from the new generation by women working outside the home” (Key, 1909, p. 87).

The child's right to choose his/her own parents

The child's right to choose his/her parents sounds immediately problematic; the paradoxical formula that Ellen Key uses gives the idea of visionary charge that the issue of children's rights takes on in its first phase of history, even in the awareness of those who bring it to public attention. If the idea that a child who is not yet born can choose the parents who will bring him into the world seems disconcerting, the thought that animates this principle is not so at all: the rhetorical formula introduces an appeal to the man and the woman who plan to build a family together giving birth to a child, so that they ask themselves seriously and conscientiously whether their living conditions, their state of physical and psychological health, give them the right

to assume that the child will be born happy and healthy: “There is an old axiom that we are obliged to thank our parents for life. [...] But generally, parents must on their part, ask the children's pardon for the children's existence” (Key, 1909, p. 47).

Love is everything, but not enough: if the answer to that question were to be realistically negative, the wisdom of the couple should lead them to give up having a child, who has the right to be born wanted and loved by his/her parents, and also to come into the world in a family ready to support his/her growth in a living environment that is healthy from all points of view.

It is not a question that can be answered lightly: it is the child's right not to expiate the vices of his/her parents, inheriting the evils that result from their behaviour; every adult, every couple, before giving birth to a child, should consider carefully whether there is a risk that their lifestyle, their habits and their condition could endanger the health, welfare and quality of life of the unborn child. Ellen Key takes a position on parenting which cannot but arouse a certain uneasiness, for the peremptoriness with which a theoretically acceptable principle is proposed as a rule of conduct and absolute selection criterion. This uneasiness is attenuated when placing that statement back in the social context the early twentieth century: the problem of early infant mortality along with the incidence of debilitating congenital diseases and those acquired due to sanitation deficiencies was very topical and a source of major concern. In this light, one better understands the appeal to a mindful parenting and procreation considered not as a right but as a responsibility: at a time when sexually transmitted diseases were still a scourge for the European population, where alcoholism was a widespread social problem, where sanitation conditions were a social emergency that still heavily influenced the infant mortality rate and the problem of congenital disabilities, this principle is very similar to the appeal to consider abstinence from giving birth to a baby as a possibility and sometimes as a duty and procreation not as an instinctive behaviour, but rather as a deliberate and conscious choice: “Men will no longer mistake impulse for love. [...] Where the amelioration of the human race is concerned, the transformation of customs and feelings is always the essential thing” (Key, 1909, p. 59).

The wording of this fundamental principle, together with the previous one, and in an even more striking way, indicates in some way the beginning of a new phase in the history of contemporary culture in which an original conception of childhood begins to break free, slowly and laboriously, from the legacy of a tradition that has long prevented considering the social issues concerning the living conditions of boys and girls in a careful and aware way. The moment of conception is one of those behaviours which, in Ellen Key's opinion, human beings have always implemented in a purely instinctive form, just like many of the behaviours related to the previous period and the one following it: the appeal to rationality is an invitation to the assumption of responsibility for behaviours for the good of the unborn child, to set aside

popular common sense replete with ignorance and superstition in favour of an aware attitude and conscious control. "It lies in the individual sphere of woman's choice as of men's choice not to choose marriage, or to desire it without parenthood" (Key, 1909, p. 69).

The right of children to wisely choose their parents is formulated today in a more direct and less rhetoric way, but the underlying principle remains the one developed in 1900 by Ellen Key: the child's right not to be born. The first question that animates today's debate on this right is its very existence or plausibility. It is an unresolved dilemma, and that is why there is no trace of this right in any international juridical document on children's rights. The problem is very complex, since it calls into question much deeper issues. Can you allow a right so radical as to contradict a priori all the other fundamental rights of every human being? And above all, based on what criteria and established in what way and by whom, should this right be operated? That is, in which cases, for the child would it be better not to be born rather than to be born? The question is not purely philosophical, nor can it be easily resolved by refusing to face reality and making exclusive appeal to moral positions or religious dogmas, nor accusing whoever places it with trends favourable to eugenics (Cunningham, 1995/1997, p. 201; Shuttleworth, 2013, pp. 355-356). Take for example the plight of millions of children who are born with HIV-AIDS: the question about the existence of such a right not only takes on plausibility worthy of being considered in a serious way and free from bias, but also a topical character that makes the entire problem of planning or birth control no longer avoidable. Faced with the latest estimates published by worldwide agencies about the number of children sick/dead/orphaned due to AIDS the attitude of those who hide behind religious veils that prohibit even the most basic and safest forms of prevention of the spread of sexually transmissible diseases is not plausible.

Against repressive education for the child's right to self-expression

From a pedagogical point of view, Ellen Key is remembered as being one of the first and most active representatives of the New Education Movement (Veerman, 1992, p. 82). The educational premise from which the Swedish author moves towards the development of her pedagogical thinking is the Rousseau-inspired adage of a child being good by nature (Dekker, 2011, p. 479; Zuckerman, 2003, p. 228): the child is inherently good, so the teacher will have to abstain from interfering with his/her spontaneous development and waive the exercise of his authority as adult and the prerogatives connected with the power of his role. There is a clear rejection of the traditional educational model centred on the figure of the educator and who plays in a strongly asymmetrical way the educational relationship basing it on power/knowledge; and with it there is the rejection of the traditional principle according

to which the purpose of education is to model the shape of the child in the image and likeness of the adult that one wants to create: the denial of education as correction in favour of a natural education to be understood as a source of stimulation for the free unfolding of the child's growth process:

The art of natural education consists in ignoring the faults of children nine times out of ten, in avoiding immediate interference, which is usually a mistake, and devoting one's whole vigilance to the control of the environment in which the child is growing up, to watching the education which is allowed to go on by itself (Key, 1909, p. 113).

To give shape to an educational process worthy of this name, which emancipates childhood instead of suffocating it, one needs first and foremost a full and thorough knowledge of the child, of the genuine interests that he/she spontaneously expresses: in this way, education can stimulate him/her further and so support the process of development of each individual child. It is precisely this ability to consider the child's subjectivity that is missing in education, in Ellen Key's opinion: it seems that for a long time his/her innate desire to learn, his/her powerful curiosity about the world and things, his/her inclination to want to do things for him/herself and to learn through careful and indefatigable observation skills remained completely unnoticed. These are the peculiar features of childhood in general and that every boy or girl brings with him/her in a natural way when he/she enters a school classroom and that inevitably he/she tends to lose gradually, until no longer possessing them at the end of the school path, because the school has quickly dried them up and turned them off. What happens during school attendance is a real "soul murder" of children, says Ellen Key (Key, 1909, p. 203).

To this pedagogical vision, which sees education as a liberation of childhood's full natural potential, other important fundamental rights of boys and girls are tied. Every child has the right to make mistakes, says Ellen Key (Key, 1909, p. 107): every mistake contains a seed of virtue or truth, because only through one's own efforts, one's mistakes or failures does human learning take place. Errors should not be punished, because in education the rule of traditional medicine "evil must be driven out by evil" is not valid, as now it is repudiated by modern medical science. In education one must rather let nature run its course, slowly, without force, if anything intentionally acting on the context, so that there are more favourable conditions for the completion of the spontaneous growth of the child. Too often education is similar to a "personality transplant": it eradicates, even resorting to coercion, the authentic personality of the child to implant a dummy one, which corresponds not to his inclinations, but to the adult's, the family's, or society's preferences. This is, quite frankly, a real pedagogical crime: "To suppress the real personality of the child, and to sup-

plant it with another personality continues to be the pedagogical crime common to those who announce loudly that education should only develop the real individual nature of the child” (Key, 1909, p. 108).

If education has the task of promoting the development of the child as a human being, then it must begin to treat him/her as such from the outset, strengthening in him the natural disposition to become a unique and unrepeatable human being. In the final part of Ellen Key's work, therefore, we find reflections that evoke the elaboration of a third fundamental guiding principle of children's rights.

The child's right to be naughty

This is the provocative expression of a principle which directly concerns adult educators and parents but in particular primary and secondary school teachers. “The child felt in its innermost consciousness that he had a right to be naughty, a fundamental right which is accorded to adults; and not only to be naughty, but to be naughty in peace, to be left to the dangers and joys of naughtiness” (Key, 1909, p. 112): it is the child's right to their own freedom and an education that allows them to express their personality and their own inclinations, even when these might come into conflict with adult expectations, with pedagogical models and social expectations: the child must have the right not to please the adults involved in his education respected; the duty of educators is to speak to the real child, in flesh and blood and to refrain from the temptation to intervene on him/her in order to mould him/her to one's liking, according to their own interests and motives (Key, 1909, pp. 144-145): “Despite all the new talk of individuality, the greatest mistake in training children is still that of treating the “child” as an abstract conception, as an inorganic or personal material to be formed and transformed by the hands of those who are educating him. He is beaten, and it is thought that the whole effect of the blow stops at the moment when the child is prevented from being bad”.

Too often the parent or teacher calls the boy who does not obey, who does not humour him, and who does not respect the discipline imposed naughty: in reality, the naughty child is often only a child who behaves in a spontaneous and free manner, who exercises his own free will or follows the path of his own desires and his own pleasure. It is necessary to renew our educational models, to make them more flexible, to centre them on the child and his needs and capabilities, rather than the needs and timing of the adult educator. This is not the educator's abdication from his/her role, but an overall and deep rethinking of the aims of education themselves:

For success in training children the first condition is to become as a child oneself, but this means no assumed childishness, no condescending baby-talk that the child immediately sees through and deeply abhors. What it means is to be as entirely and

simply taken up with the child as the child himself is absorbed by his life. It means to treat the child as really one's equal, that is, to show him the same consideration, the same kind of confidence one shows to an adult. It means not to influence the child to be what we ourselves desire him to become but to be influenced by the impression of what the child himself is; not to treat the child with deception, or by the exercise of force, but with the seriousness and sincerity proper to his own character (Key, 1909, p. 109).

The child's right to his/her own personality and the educator's duty to refrain from exercising his authority to mould and adapt him/her to ideal models would be reflected in the *International Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, launched in London in 1942 by the International League for new education. In this document which specifically tackles matters relating to the issues of the right to education, we find the articulation of many pedagogical insights contained in the principle articulated by Ellen Key: "While fine words are spoken about individual development, children are treated as if their personality had no purpose of its own, as if they were made only for the pleasure, pride, and comfort of their parents; and as these aims are best advanced when children become like everyone else, people usually begin by attempting to make them respectable and useful members of society" (Key, 1909, pp. 118-119).

The new education moves from the needs of children and not the expectations of adults, so the methods, contents and objectives will be calibrated not to the world seen, lived in and desired by adults, but in relation to the actual living world of the child, to his/her features, to his/her needs and skills. More and more, in the following years, the renewal of education would feed on this interest in knowing more about the child's humanity; that same interest that would fuel the new culture struggling with the identification and articulation of the content of the specific rights of children.

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